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SUBJECT: AN EVENTFUL EVENING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY IN THE URALS

11. ConGen Yekaterinburg's Public Affairs Section sponsored an evening of African American Poetry at the Urals Literary Museum on Wednesday, February 25. PAO kicked off the event with an IIP-produced Powerpoint presentation on Black History Month. The presentation provided an introduction to African American culture and history as a setting to the poetry readings. Professor Galina Babich, Dean of the International Relations of the Urals Pedagogical University followed with an introduction to African American literature. Regional English Language Fellow Vito Reardon then gave an overview of Maya Angelou's life. Professor Babich's English students had translated a few of Maya Angelou's poems into Russian that were printed in a booklet distributed to the audience of fifty, mostly students and teachers. The students also read the original and translations, including "Why the Caged Bird Sings," "A Million Man March," and "A Phenomenal Woman." A choir of young women then sang a spiritual called "Feeling Good."

12. Next was a live DVC with African-American poet Thylas Moss, who appeared from a college classroom at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where she teaches English literature. The audience had a fascinating encounter with Ms. Moss who shared intimate details of her life story, her philosophy of poetry, and a reading of her poem, "I Want To Be." The DVC connection held out reasonably well, despite the fact that the internet signal in the nineteenth century wooden museum was coming through a cellphone modem plugged into a laptop plugged into a projector, camera and speakers. The technology came through to provide a stimulating, creative interaction between the Russian audience and the African-American poet. Many of the students were moved by Ms. Moss' poignant life story and the profundity of her poetry and philosophy. At one point the Skype connection lost sound but a local translator volunteered to read a poem by African-American poet Marilyn Henson, who had visited Yekaterinburg the year before. This provided a good lesson to have backup material in case the technology fails. After the DVC, the audience witnessed two of Ms. Moss' video "poams" (Products Of Acts of Making) featured on You Tube.

13. Following the event a Ministry of Culture representative and the Museum Director expressed their appreciation for this in-depth introduction to African-American culture, which is little understood in Russia. Participants also conveyed their surprise at the avante garde character of the program.

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